

THE U.S. AND THE LOWER MEKONG: BUILDING CAPACITY TO MANAGE NATURAL RESOURCES



***“The United States is back in Southeast Asia....and we are fully engaged with our....
partners on the wide range of challenges confronting us...”***

— Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton

The Lower Mekong region, which comprises the nations of Cambodia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam, is united by a common natural heritage of forests, floodplains and inland waterways. At the center of this vast tropical network, the Mekong River and its tributaries provide water, food, energy, and transportation to over 60 million inhabitants and sustain one of the most biodiverse ecosystems on earth. Proper management of these natural resources is key to the sustainable development of the region.

In July 2009, the United States joined these countries to launch the Lower Mekong Initiative in order to promote cooperation on issues of regional importance, including the environment. Since then, the United States has launched or expanded a number of projects designed to help better manage the invaluable natural resources that the Mekong River system provides.

Strengthening Water Management

The Mississippi River Commission and the Mekong River Commission both play key roles in managing vital waterways in their respective regions. In 2010, the two bodies will launch a “sister-river partnership” to promote cooperation and share best practices in areas such as integrated floodplain management, climate change adaptation, and sustainable basin development.

Cleaning up waterways

Agricultural and mining runoff, sewage and wastewater, and industrial pollution all threaten the safety and productivity of

The Lower Mekong Initiative

focuses on:

- Environment
- Health
- Education
- Infrastructure

the Mekong’s waters. In 2010, the United States will join with the Mekong River Commission and local communities to improve regional coordination in managing pollution.

Protecting Forests

Deforestation, wildlife trafficking and other illicit activities have significantly degraded

forest resources in the Lower Mekong. National Park Service staff have developed a dynamic field-level exchange program to provide land management, stewardship, and law enforcement training for rangers in Cambodia’s Samlaut Protected Area. The training is part of a vibrant sister-park relationship designed to build local capacity to protect this diverse ecosystem.

Building Science Partnerships

Data-sharing among scientists is key to finding sustainable ways to develop the Lower Mekong Basin. In December, the U.S. Geological Survey and Vietnam’s Can Tho University brought together scientists and experts from throughout the region to share information on how climate change and human activities could impact the ecology and food security of the Mekong basin.

Advancing Clean Energy

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions will help reduce the negative impacts of climate change. Through the Methane-to-Markets Partnership initiative, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is working with the livestock and food processing industries in Thailand and Vietnam to capture methane release from swine farms and convert it into electricity.